

A Robin Singh revelation

MUMBAI, July 7: In a startling disclosure, all-rounder Robin Singh said the Indian World Cup team management was unsure about the method by which points were to be carried from the first phase into the Super Six stage of the championship till the end of their first league match, reports PTI.

The revelation by Robin Singh, who was here en route to his adopted home of Chennai after visiting his ailing father at his birthplace, Trinidad, highlighted the team management's lack of preparation for the mega event.

The team management, he was referring to, consisted of captain Mohammad Azharuddin, vice-captain Ajay Jadeja, coach Anshuman Gaekwad and manager Brijesh Patel and the squad had reached England as early as April 24.

"As a player I am interested in knowing the format of the tournament but no one gave us (rest of the players) the right answers about the points to be carried forward till the end of the match against South Africa," Robin told reporters here last night.

"I feel we would have won against South Africa if we had scored 275. At one stage, it looked attainable when we were 190 for one with 12 overs left," the all-rounder said.

"I do not want to put any blame on the format for our failure to make it to the semifinals. If we had won against South Africa and then not lost to Zimbabwe, we would have been easily in the last four," he pointed out.

"A lot of people have said our loss to Zimbabwe cost us dearly, but I want to emphasise that the loss to South Africa was the more important one. The final analysis as we could not score enough runs from the commanding position we were in. We put on only 62 runs in the last 12 overs despite the fact that we had lost only one wicket. Even here the last 3 overs got us 30 runs," he said.

The South Africans were looking dejected when we were 190 for one. They were not getting the wickets and I know the thoughts that must have gone in their brains. But we did not get enough runs from that position. Against Australia too in the six stage the batters let us down," Singh said.

"A lot of people have blamed only the bowlers for our partners. What about the batters? We had the best batting line-up in the entire tournament and we did not bat out any team except Sri Lanka. There were a lot of individual performances but not a combined effort on the whole. When the batting clicked, the bowling failed and when the bowling clicked the batting did not come off. We did not seize our chances," the Chennai-based cricketer said.

Robin was very hurt at being dropped for the England match after taking five wickets in the previous Group A match against Sri Lanka and of being told about his omission only the morning of the tie against the tournament hosts.

Bigger tennis balls!

NOORDWIJK, Netherlands, July 7: The International Tennis Federation (ITF) submitted its proposal on Tuesday to slow the game by introducing bigger balls, reports Reuters.

The governing body want a two-year experiment in which balls eight per cent larger but no heavier are used. They would travel slower and bounce higher, giving the receiver of service about 10 per cent more reaction time.

The experiment would be conducted from club level to the lower reaches of the Davis and Fed Cups.

"There are concerns over the speed of the game and the dominance of the serve, especially on faster surfaces. A larger ball may have a number of potential benefits which we would only realise or not with experiments," said ITF spokesman Alun James.

The ITF is saying it needs to know much more about the inter-relationship between balls, court surfaces and rackets."

A final decision will be made at the ITF's annual meeting on Thursday or Friday.

Critics claim that with service speeds in men's and women's tennis reaching 240 kph and 205 kph respectively, the prospect of rallies lessens and damages entertainment value.

US Davis Cup team O'Brien fills last spot

CHESTNUT HILL, Massachusetts, July 7: Alex O'Brien was named as the fourth and final member of the US Davis Cup team that will play Australia and is expected to partner Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras in the doubles, reports Reuters.

The selection of O'Brien was announced Monday night at the Longwood Cricket Club, the site of the July 16-18 matches, at a 120th birthday celebration of Davis Cup founder Dwight Davis.

The quarterfinal tie between Australia and the United States marks a 100th-year celebration of Davis Cup. The first matches in the national team competition were contested between the United States and Britain at Longwood in 1900.

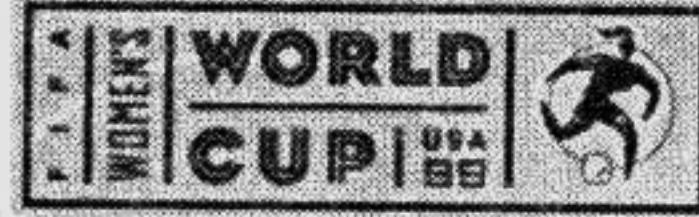
O'Brien joins Sampras, Jim Courier and Todd Martin on the US squad.

The 29-year-old O'Brien will be making his third appearance on the US team, having gone 1-2 in Davis Cup play.



The US Women's World Cup squad jogging at Claremont, California on July 6. — AFP photo

Americans soccerised



CLAREMONT, California, July 7 (AP): Soccermania has hit the United States.

In the midst of one of its countless bus rides during the Women's World Cup, the US team was told that Saturday's final against China was sold out. The Rose Bowl will be filled, just as it was for the men's championship five years ago. And this time, President Bill Clinton will attend.

"We all kind of jumped out of our seats and were pumping our fists and yelling and cheering," Brandy Chastain said Tuesday.

"What a great tribute," Cindy Parlow added. "I think the fans appreciate how much we appreciate their coming to the games and coming out to see us."

The Women's World Cup has become a phenomenon in this country. Sure, soccer isn't a high-profile sport in America and the Major League Soccer is struggling to draw fans and television ratings.

But the American women have captured the imagination of the nation with their forthrightness, friendliness and accessibility.

"It's something we want to do," Milbrett said. "We'll stay and sign autographs and

we'll talk to the fans because we want to do it, not because someone tells us we should. It's important to them and it's important to us."

Clinton, who attended the quarterfinal victory over Germany in Landover, Maryland, decided Tuesday to extend his seven-state trip across the country through the weekend so he can attend the final. In 1994, Clinton went to the World Cup opener in Chicago, and Vice President Gore went to the final.

After the team's first practice in preparation for the final, the players were interviewed by reporters from television networks and national news magazines.

What they found is what those following the team for the last month have long known. This is a refreshing group of athletes who understand exactly what is happening. And cherish it.

"We've been excited by the tournament and overwhelmed by the response," Chastain said. "I knew there was a special package we had to offer and now we are getting a chance to present it."

What makes it extra special is that the women are doing it on their own. While they were one of the more popular teams at the 1996 Olympics, they shared the spotlight with the US basketball, softball and

gymnastics teams that won gold medals. This time, the Americans and Chinese and Brazilians are selling soccer — and selling out major league stadiums.

This event has done better than anyone could have expected," Milbrett said. "I'm shocked at how massive it has been."

"We knew it would be huge and we felt it would be OK if we have maybe 40,000 fans at the games. But we never thought of anything like sellouts at every game."

It doesn't hurt, either, that the teams generally have given the US public what it craves, wide-open play, lots of scoring, spectacular goalkeeping and passion.

"It makes us smile. It's really flattering that the fans see that from us," Tisha Venturini said. "They see how much you can enjoy what you're doing."

Can they really enjoy the prospect of facing China, which has been the best team in the tournament and routed defending champion Norway 5-0 in the semifinals?

"I remember back in the FIFA All-Star game in February, the Chinese keeper (Gao Hong) saying it will be China and US in the World Cup final," Milbrett said. "I really believe that's how it should be. We've earned it."

A Thai's Premiership goal



BANGKOK, July 7: Thai striker Kiatasak Senanueng is carrying the hopes of his football-crazy nation on his shoulders as he chases his dream of a lucrative career with English Premier League Middlesbrough, reports AFP.

Kiatasak, skipper of the national team, has just started a two-week trial with the club, which fields troubled midfield star Paul Gascoigne and is managed by Manchester United legend Bryan Robson.

Thailand's national team coach, Peter Withe, a former Aston Villa and England striker,

said he believed Kiatasak had the ability to make a mark in English football.

He had only two weeks of preparation but his speed and tactical awareness are good enough for the Premier League," Withe was quoted as saying in the Thail press.

"His desire will help him to succeed," he said.

Kiatasak, 26, nicknamed "Zico" after the great Brazilian,

burst to prominence when he led Thailand to the gold medal at the Southeast Asian Games in Singapore six years ago.

He also turned out for the Palis club of Malaysia for a season.

"If I have the chance I would certainly go to play with other foreign teams again," he was quoted as saying in Thai news papers before he left for England on Saturday.

"I think working with the real professional team will improve my skill a lot," he said.

Boro spotted Kiatasak on a pre-season tour of Thailand two years ago.

"We just thought we would have a look at him," Robson was quoted as saying in the Thail press.

Kiatasak's progress in England is being followed with extensive coverage in the Thai language press and with frequent updates on television.

If he were to secure a contract with Middlesbrough, Kiatasak would be following an Asian trail blazed by several Japanese and Chinese stars starting to force their way into professional squads in England and Europe.

Kiatasak's quest is being closely watched by Thailand's football association, which is

trying to turn the country into an Asian footballing power.

European football, especially the English premier league, is followed fervently by Thais.

The trade in replica football shirts and soccer memorabilia is worth millions of dollars a year here and many of the top teams indulge their passion for betting with live satellite television.

Their appetites have been whetted recently with visits by top premiership clubs on summer tours.

Thailand's national side recently beat a jet-lagged Arsenal, English double winners in 1998, and are about to embark on qualifying campaigns for the Southeast Asian Games and Sydney 2000 Olympics.

The side is also building for the 2002 World Cup Finals which will be held in Asia for the first time when they are co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.

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Clinton will grace the WWC final

EST ST LOUIS, Illinois, July 7: Diehard sports fan President Bill Clinton has rearranged his busy schedule so that he can see the Women's World Cup final in California Saturday.

With millions of people in the United States and even more in her native country watching on television, Sun will lead China in the Women's World Cup championship game against the Americans.

Contracted players receive a base retainer, tour fees and match fees when playing at home.

Under a formula agreed with the Australian Cricketers Association, the minimum retainer is \$65,000 dollars and the maximum \$220,000 dollars.

Clinton is looking forward to the Pan-Pacifics next month, although I know that the opposition will be a lot stronger."

The closest race of the day was won by Russia's Andrei Perminov in the men's 100 metres breaststroke.

Clinton met in the locker room after the game with the women's team, which invited him to attend the final Saturday, Siewert said.

College basketball is Clinton's favourite sport and he spends many a day on the golf course, but he is an avid spectator of just about any game and the success of the US women's football team has boosted interest here beyond the wildest dreams of the FIFA.

Clinton, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea were among 54,642 at Cooke Stadium in Landover, Maryland who saw the US teams 3-2 triumph over Germany.

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ACB releases list, No room for Elliott

SYDNEY, July 7: Former Test opening batsman Matthew Hayden is set for a surprise recall to the Test team after Matthew Elliott was today dumped from the Australian Cricket Board's list of 25 contracted players for the coming season, reports AFP.

Left-hander Hayden, thought to have been out of calculations after a poor tour of South Africa in 1997, was added to the list, heightening speculation he will go to the Australian team to Sri Lanka next month and Zimbabwe in October.

An ACB statement said contract selection had been based on form and the likelihood of Australian selection over the next 12 months.

Elliott, recalled in February when Mark Taylor retired, had wretched tour of the West Indies earlier this year and was dropped for the final Test in Antigua.

With Justin Langer at No 3, the Waugh twins and Ricky Ponting filling out the Test lineup, it looks as though Hayden will return to the national team despite a modest 1998-99 Sheffield Shield average of 40.35.

However, he has a 68.1 average in this season's English county championship for Northamptonshire, scoring an impressive four centuries in 11 innings.

Young West Australian left-hander Simon Katich can also start packing his bags for the Sri Lankan tour after winning his first contract — worth a minimum \$65,000 dollars (43,000).

Captain Steve Waugh and the three-man panel requested the ACB blood a young player as 15th man and Katich, 23, has the goods following his 1,039 first-class runs at 61.12 last season.

Those winning first-time contracts were English-born allrounder Andrew Symonds, Queensland paceman Adam Dale, NSW all-rounder Shane Lee and Versatile Tasmanian bowler Colin Miller.

Those not to have their contracts renewed were Queensland ex-Test pacemen Michael Kasprowicz and Andrew Bichel, New South Wales spinner Gavin Robertson and South Australian spinner Brad Young.

Australia play four one-dayers in Sri Lanka followed by three Tests, before flying to Zimbabwe for an inaugural Test and three one-dayers.

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